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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the creation, organizational stages, intervention activities, and outcomes of the School Improvement Resource Team (SIRT) in the Buffalo Public Schools (New York) from 1977 to 1980. Intended primarily to defuse tensions during implementation of court ordered desegregation, the SIRT effort serves as an apparently successful attempt to transplant to an eastern, urban setting the earlier internal cadre development work done by Schmuck and Runkel. The paper states the goals of organizational development; discusses briefly the phases in the SIRT's growth as a team; describes the SIRT's intervention activities, including formation of a student relations committee, interventions in three high schools and several elementary schools, and interventions and activities performed outside the school setting; and analyzes the critical issues that faced the SIRT, including gaining entry to schools without invitations, obtaining teacher participation, developing effective site teams, maintaining liaison with the central office, developing internal leadership, and obtaining adequate resources. In conclusion, the paper identifies the lessons learned during the SIRT's existence that may be transferable to similar situations: self-renewal is enhanced by development of internal change teams; change teams must relate well to the powers that be; adaptability must be the team's way of life; and cost-benefit considerations are substantial. (Author/PGD)

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THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF AN INTERNAL CHANGE TEAM: THE DUFFALO EXPERIENCE

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THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF AN INTERNAL CHANGE TEAM: THE BUFFALO EXPERIENCE

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Since mid-1977 the Buffalo New York Public School District has been involved with the institutionalization of an internal change team--the School Improvement Resource Team (SIRT)--as one of the district's responses to a racial desegregation order by the federal courts. The discussion in this paper will include an exploration of the thinking that led to the establishment of the team; a review of SIRT's training and development as a functioning group; and SIRT's experiences with intervention activities. The paper will highlight issues that have challenged the team and explore lessons that can be of help to other school districts that might be contemplating the development of a similar group.

School-Based Change: Buffalo's Choice

Much hope, energy and dollars have gone into efforts to bring about change in our nation's schools, particularly between the mid-1960's and the mid 1970's. The general conclusion of the comprehensive Rand study (1975) is that many innovations were launched, few were implemented successfully and even fewer have been institutionalized. Berman and McLaughlin (1980), two Rand investigators, note that, while resources are certainly part of the difficulty, in the final analysis "the problem of change is fundamentally a management problem...From the beginning to

the final stages of a project, a supportive institutional environment is necessary for a project to be effectively implemented and to take root". (p. 71)

As is true with most school districts, Buffalo has had its share of high hopes for effecting change and, too often, disappointment in the results obtained. Therefore as the deadline for compliance with the court's order approached, the district's leaders were particularly concerned that things go well. They had already encountered problems among staff, students and community interest groups during the earlier efforts to desegregate the district's elementary schools. Furthermore, they had been watching the serious disruptions that were accompanying the desegregation efforts of the Louisville and Boston schools and wanted to do all they could to assure that these disruptions would not occur in Buffalo.

After extensive planning and consultation the district unveiled a desegregation plan that it hoped would achieve maximum commitment from the community. By emphasizing magnet schools as the center piece of the program the focus was placed on quality education rather than on desegregation. This effectively defused the highly-emotional issue of race in the community.

With growing signs of community support, school leaders turned to the development of the "supportive institutional environment" that, as the Rand study noted, is "necessary" if meaningful innovations are to become institutionalized. The district set out to retool staff members, focusing on the modification of attitudes and the development of skills that would minimize potential disruptions as minority and

majority students encountered each other in the same schools. All school personnel attended short-term workshops established for these purposes. However, top level officials also recognized that a capacity would have to be developed at the individual school level to deal with the desegregation-related problems that would inevitably arise. In short, school faculty members would have to learn how to cope on a long term basis.

As a result of some earlier organization development (OD) work in the district the senior author of the paper was asked to lend some assistance in this effort. OD has been defined as:

> a coherent, systematically planned, sustained effort at system self-study and improvement, focusing explicitly on change in formal and informal procedures, processes, norms or structures, using behavioral science concepts. The goals of OD include <u>both</u> the quality of life of individuals as well as improving organizational functioning and performance. (Miles and Fullan, 1980, p. 90).

To achieve these OD goals requires much time and effort. Outside consultants rarely stay around long enough to see them to completion. Therefore it was recommended that Buffalo explore the possibility of establishing an internal change group to enhance the potential for organizational "self renewal"

The model for the development of such a group was taken from the work done several years earlier in Kent, Washington and Eugene, Oregon, by Schmuck and Runkel (c.f., Schmuck, Runkel, Arends and Arends, 1977, chp. 12). These earlier efforts would have to be modified to meet the differing needs of the situation. Specifically, the learnings derived from medium-sized western communities would have to be adapted to meet the needs of an older and much larger eastern city. In addition the

focus of attention would be on a narrow and critical issue--racial desegregation--rather than on the general upgrading of organizational performance.

After much discussion, the basic approach to the project was developed and the district's curriculum director wrote an ESEA Title IV-C proposal, which was subsequently approved, to get the necessary funds. The senior author's role was to help select the team, provide it with the basic training required, and guide it through the first two years of its activities. Since that time the team has continued to function on its own.

SIRT: From Idea to Performance

As time passed SIRT moved through several distinct phases. To understand this movement it will be helpful to lay out the major events that have occurred in the short life of this internal change team. The early history of SIRT is described in detail elsewhere (Milstein, 1979) so the treatment here will be limited to a brief summary. Figure I categorizes events from SIRT's inception (Summer of 1977) up to the present (April, 1980), as membership selection, training, internal maintenance issues, external maintenance issues, and intervention activities.

FIGURE 1

MAJOR SIRT EVENTS, 1977-1980

TOPICS	SPRING 1977	SUMMER, 1977	FALL, 1977	SPRING, 1978	SUMMER, 1978	FALL, 1978	SPRING, 1979	SUMMER, 1979	FALL, 1979	SPRING, 1980
SIRT membership selection	-Selection process: 1 of 65 applicants.			-Second generation team selected; 10 of 45 applicants.					-SRC Teacher advisors assume responsibility for planning and operation of SRC, but do not become members of SIRT.	-Exploration of alternatives for team expansion being discussed.
SIRT training		-Two weeks on processes, one week on macro-designing, facilitated by outside consultant.	-Monthly in-service meetings. A portion of each meeting normally devoted to further training facilitated by outside consultant.		-Three weeks. Outside consultant facilitated original team's training. Original team facilitated "second generation" team's training.	-Monthly in-service meetings. Time for training cut back as press of ongoing activities requires more time for "business" discussions.		-Two weeks. Facilitation responsibility divided among SIRT members.	-Monthly in-service meetings become even more "business" oriented and training opportunities decrease further.	
Maintenance Issues: Internal		-Five of the original 16 members resigned within first week of training.	-Establishment of internal working relationships. -One member asked to resign by the team. -Shift in leadership from consultant to team.			-Identification of two team members to act as coordinators. Shift from leadership of consultant to the team is completed. -Weaving of the two "generations" into one team is accomplished. -Some members sense work "overload".			-"Overload syndrome continues to be a problem; new approaches are being devised. SIRT members are beginning to share the work more equitably.	
Maintenance Issues: External		-Press by central office (CO) for team to take on tasks before it is fully prepared.	-Need to gain visibility within the district. -Lack of CO understanding of OD. SIRT members' principals complain about them being out of the buildings. -Demands for achievement by CO..... -Need to identify alternative sources of funding because the district			-Rules are laid down for SIRT activities by the CO (e.g., budget reports and time sheets). -Improvement of liaison function with the CO continues to be necessary and time consuming.....	-SIRT writes several grant proposals which are approved and becomes the best funded in-service arm in the district.			
SIRT Intervention activities		-One day workshops in three decegregated high schools. -One week training for school-based in-service groups ("liaison teams")		-Additional training for liaison teams. -Problem-based intervention for faculty of a special education school -In-service training for one of the magnet schools.	is under increasing budgetary constraints.	-Issue-identification sessions for two district community groups. -Problem-based intervention for two high schools. -Student Relations Committee (SRC) from 3 high schools formed by SIRT. Focus on skill development, problem identification and problem resolutions. -In-service sessions for two elementary schools.	-Problem-based intervention in a third high school.		-Continuation of the three high school projects. -Continuation of SRC project ..... -Goal setting and needs assessment for ESAA advisory committee	-Problem-based intervention in four elementary schools. -Conference for high school teachers, school board and CO administrators.

Tuckman (1965) has identified four stages of group development: forming, storming, norming and performing. SIRT has gone through all four of these stages in its three short years. Therefore, it may be useful to summarize the information from Figure I, using Tuckman's four stages.

Forming

The first stage, "forming," is a period during which a group is established, tests its parameters and displays dependency upon authority figures. SIRT's forming stage lasted from selection (16 of 65 applicants survived a rigorous screening process to make the team) through the intense training during the summer of 1977, when members became more aware of the high-risk commitment they had made. During the first week of that training five of the original sixteen members resigned. Each seemed to have a good reason, but the departures left the others feeling quite unsettled. One of those who remained commented that others might have departed because of their concern about the nature of the tasks that lay ahead of the group. He then admitted to feeling the same concern himself. To his surprise others also admitted having such concerns. "The ensuing discussion was the most critical to that point: it helped members to realize that they were not alone in their concerns and that support structures would have to be built within the team. The air was cleared and the team solidified . . ." (Milstein, 1979, p. 109).

The responsibilities for training "liaison teams"* and the faculty of the three high schools most affected by the desegregation program also were critical factors in SIRT's formative stage. These projects were considerable challenges which the group met more than adequately. By the end of the summer the team was beginning to recognize its potential capability.

Storming

The second stage, "storming," is one in which group members vie with each other for power and influence and, as a group, employ their newly discovered strength to challenge established authority figures. The initial jockeying for leadership roles took place during the first summer. The team decided to confront the issue directly because members realized that team maintenance issues should not be glossed over. The response that was fashioned was to develop a planning structure that permits wide involvement and to devise a group leadership structure that is flexible enough to allow team members to take part as they desire. Over the course of any one year it is likely that all team members will plan for and/or facilitate several team sessions.

As for the established authority figure--the consultant, by the second week of training the team challenged his right to require outside reading. Members insisted that <u>all</u> training activity must be done within established training time. The consultant acquiesced. This was

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* "Liaison teams" were composed of approximately six teachers and administrators from each of eight schools that were significantly affected by the court order. These teams received a week of training from SIRT so that they could then devise and run in-service programs for their own schools.

the only explicit "rebellion," perhaps because SIRT members realized that they were highly dependent upon the consultant's advice and direction, at least until they became capable of establishing field sites and conducting intervention activities. Over time, the team-consultant strain disappeared as SIRT became more skillful and confident and the consultant gradually withdrew from a central leadership role.

Norming

The storming stage is superseded by a preoccupation with group cohesion or "norming." Regularization of activities and maintenance concerns dominate. SIRT members felt that this stage would take forever. In actuality, it lasted from September of 1977 through February of 1978. It was a most difficult period, representing a shift in leadership from consultant to team, the development of internal management systems (e.g., writing policies and procedures and establishing meeting formats), and the exploration of structures for interacting with central office authorities and school site leaders. With so much energy required for such maintenance activities, the team was unable to get down to intervention strategy development very effectively.

The most difficult task, as it turned out, was the development of standards of acceptable behavior for team members. This issue was forced on the group when one of its members appeared to be inadequately performing the tasks assigned to her and members feared that she was jeopardizing SIRT's acceptance by the district's schools. At first the group shied away from the problem, seeming to hope that she would just

go away or that the consultant or a central office official would resolve it. However, it soon became apparent that she would not quit and that others would not resolve the issue. SIRT would have to deal with it.

Once it made a commitment to confront the problem, the team behaved in an humane way. First it tried coaching to help the member improve her performance. This failing, the team tried to counsel her to resign. When she refused the group by consensus, petitioned the central office to have her removed from its rolls. The team had taken responsibility for itself, developing acceptable norms of behavior: "In a sense,..members were developing an evaluation process that they might also have to confront some day. This experience has, if anything, enhanced SIRT members' sense of ownership and control of the group's destiny" (Milstein, 1979, p. 111).

During this difficult time SIRT turned inward to establish norms, procedures and structures. This all required support and patience on the part of those who held performance expectations for the group; i.e., central office administrators. Unfortunately this support and patience was in short supply. These administrators, understandably but unrealistically, were counting on immediate performance and were not interested in hearing about team maintenance needs. As a result this was a time of stress, misunderstanding, and frustration in the relationship between SIRT and the central office.

Performing

Finally, with the earlier issues adequately resolved, the last stage, "performing," can be reached. At this stage a group should

be ready to focus on goal-related activities.* This stage began during the Spring of 1978, when SIRT took on three large-scale intervention activities. Two came from SIRT members' schools; a "magnet" school that had in-service funds for staff development and a school for special children that felt threatened by the mainstreaming requirements of P.L. 94-142. Another project, devised by the team, brought liaison teams together for monthly training to further enhance their ability to provide in-service training for their own schools.

Outcomes during this time were mixed. The "magnet" school project was dropped because the staff at the school refused to give the time and energy commitment that was required. The liaison teams fell to complaining about the lack of support at their home schools and attendance at SIRT-led sessions began to drop off.** The school for special children did achieve its goals and has been able to forestall any attempts to close or restructure the school.

Since this relatively shakey start SIRT has increased both the quantity and the "success" ratio of its intervention activities. Projects have included the selection and training of a second SIRT generation; re-entry into the three most desegregation-affected high schools for long-term projects; formation of an ongoing group of

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*The four stages do not separate neatly of course. A group may still be working on cohesion issues when it is already performing. SIRT's experience is that new maintenance issues arise as the group changes in membership and as individual needs shift.

**The liaison team project did have an interesting side benefit for SIRT. Many liaison team members made application for SIRT membership in the second round invitation. In fact, more than half of the second generation group was selected from among liaison team applicants.

approximately fifty student leaders from these three schools to become skilled spokesmen for the student bodies of these schools; interventions with several community-based groups; and, most recently, assistance in several elementary sites slated for school-closings and development of a conference to air issues between high school teachers, board members and central office officials.

The significant increase in SIRT intervention activities occured at the same time that the consultant's role was changing. That role went from one of key leadership during the first year, to advisement during the second year, to withdrawal by the start of the third year.

SIRT Intervention Activities

This section will explore SIRT's recent intervention activities. As the reader will note, these activities have expanded in scope and diversified in approach since the earlier endeavors. SIRT has purposefully experimented with intervention formats in an attempt to meet the diverse needs of varying school and non-school field sites.

The Student Relations Committee

One of SIRT's long standing projects is the Student Relations Committee (SRC). SRC is composed of approximately fifty students from the three academic high schools undergoing the greatest extent of racial desegregation.* The students, their teacher advisors and several SIRT members have been meeting monthly for all-day skill development and issue-focused sessions. The students have been most concerned about

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*As noted, SIRT also is working on separate projects with the faculties of these schools.

discipline, student morale, teacher-student relations, school spirit and class-cutting. SRC meetings act as a useful forum for exchange of information and ideas which are then carried by the students to their own schools for further discussion and possible action with key teachers and administrators. SRC is now completing two years of existence and has replenished its student ranks several times.

Many specific outcomes can be credited to the creativity and energy of this group. For example, in each of the three SRC schools members have constructed and maintained "Events Calendars" to keep students informed about school activities. The calendar idea grew out of a desire to improve student communications, and a wish to increase school spirit and participation in school activities. Similarly, each school SRC group meets regularly with school administrators to share concerns and discuss strategies for school improvement. Action committees have been set up to deal with issues and concerns unique to each school. For example, one SRC group formed an action committee to curb "hall walking" and false fire alarms.

Students are excused from classes on their SIRT-SRC days and substitutes are provided by the school system to relieve the teacher advisors of their class responsibilities. The planning and operation of SRC, until recently the responsibility of SIRT, has been assumed by the teacher advisors. In effect, these teachers have become adjunct SIRT members for this specific project.

High Schools

When SIRT was initiated, central office administrators identified three desegregated high schools as priority intervention sites for the

team. The team conducted full day workshops just prior to the start of the 1977 school year in each site, but long-term activities were delayed until the following year, partially because of SIRT's preoccupation with maintenance problems and partially because of the preoccupation of the faculties at these schools with day-to-day survival. SIRT's efforts to make re-entry indicated that it would have to rely on teacher volunteerism for participation and that it would have to do so at a time that the teachers' union was urging its members to resist volunteering for any projects because of lack of salary raises and other contract-related issues. Still, up to twenty-five per cent of the schools' teachers have volunteered to attend after-school meetings. More recently SIRT's grants have provided in-service funds for participation so teachers are rewarded for their efforts and the continuation of these projects is enhanced. Progress, which was slow initially, seems to have gained momentum at all three sites.

School #1: Confronted with severe disciplinary problems teachers at School #1 initially focused their efforts on "hall sweeps" in which groups of staff members walk the halls to get students back into class and to remove those from other schools or dropouts just "visiting". The result has been an immediate improvement in school discipline and a more positive perception of SIRT activities in the school by other staff members.* This year the school's administration has become actively involved, volunteers have doubled in number, and the group has expanded its interests to non-disciplinary related activities.

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*The hall sweep techniques that were developed at this school have since been adapted by other schools.

School #2: The second high school also initially focused on the discipline issue, but developed another strategy. Volunteers at this school developed a schedule card to be carried by all students. The "Omega Card" includes the student's class schedule, lunch tickets, record of hall and lavatory passes, and special privileges, if any. The introduction of the Omega Card as a passive control system has provided a long term solution to the problem of student identification, hall-walking and class-cutting. In fact, the Omega Card has become a topic of discussion among high school principals who are contemplating introducing similar vehicles in their schools.

High school #2 represents a special case. On the one hand, it is the newest city high school, having graduated only two classes thus far. On the other hand, it is also slated for closing as a secondary school, to be reopened as an elementary school as per a recent court order. Before the court order was handed down SIRT helped the school's faculty to develop school traditions and activities to foster those traditions; devise strategies for increasing the school's activities fund base; and clarify special resource needs so that proposals can be written for grant-in-aid programs. After the court order was made public SIRT turned its efforts to helping the school faculty to buoy up its sagging morale and minimize the impact of the pending closing on the educational programs of existing students. As a result of these efforts and the subsequent intercession of a board member from that school's area, the school will undergo a gradual phase out instead of the more abrupt one year closing originally prescribed.

The key to SIRT's successes at this school is the principal who very early recognized the potential of SIRT for mobilizing her staff. She and her assistants have attended most all of the weekly meetings at which anywhere from ten to thirty staff members explore ways of improving the school's performance. Together this group of administrators and teachers acts as an ad hoc information sharing and decision making group that is rarely observed among urban secondary schools. The pattern of administrator and teacher cooperation developed at this school has subsequently been adopted at the other two high school intervention sites.

School #3: Late in SIRT's second year, the third high school intervention was initiated. Significant improvements have also been produced at this school. For example, the group of volunteer teachers soon adopted their own version of the Omega Card, dubbed the "Compass Card." Further, the group has met weekly with the principal to identify concerns, develop strategies, and implement action plans. One of the most substantial contributions of this intervention has been the highlighting of the class cutting problem and the assignment of a new administrative aide to the school. His duties include attendance and tardiness matters. This last outcome has been a big morale boost, particularly because it is quite unusual for the central office to add staff to a school at midyear.

Elementary Schools

SIRT has been somewhat less active in the district's elementary schools, partially because of the press of central office administrators

for SIRT to assist secondary schools and partly because the district has a full time "Human Relations" group which had made previous inroads in the elementary area. Recently, however, SIRT has begun to provide assistance to elementary schools. Initially this was done at the request of SIRT members' schools. For example, an elementary school principal, who is a member of SIRT, utilized SIRT personnel and resources in two schools to which he has been assigned. In the first case the staff of the school asked for process help to further refine the school's individualized mathematics program. The staff, meeting weekly for a semester, succeeded in developing a school-wide resource file for math materials, an individualized diagnostic test, and a procedure for assessing student progress in mathematics. The second school was faced with absorbing a junior high school level staff. Teachers and ancillary staff met for a semester to develop new policies, disciplinary procedures, and report card procedures. The group was also successful in obtaining a small state grant to develop a basic skills task force in the school.

During the Spring of 1980, SIRT was called upon to help three elementary schools slated for closing. SIRT's task is to assist these schools in the development of plans for orderly closings by training school-based liaison teams that will then in-service the faculties involved. These projects will continue into the summer of 1980.

Other Interventions

Besides conducting long-term interventions SIRT has been called upon to facilitate short-term projects, varying from half-a-day to several days in time. These projects vary widely, including such

different purposes as (1) assisting newly developed regional assessment centers establish norms, structures and decision-making strategies for placing special children in city schools, and (2) conducting conference day workshops for the teachers' union.

SIRT has also conducted several non-school interventions. For example, it has helped a city-wide citizens advisory council to establish goals and assess needs related to desegregation. The favorable response of this group to that SIRT effort was, in turn, quite helpful in assuring that SIRT would be included in subsequent grant proposals.

Two other community projects were conducted with groups established by the board of education to monitor and recommend policy for schools in their areas. SIRT conducted several problem identification and resolution sessions for these groups, which included board of education members, school principals, city councilmen, and the mayor's education aide, as well as members of the community.

SIRT's most recent effort is an off-shoot of the intervention at High School No. 1. It was suggested by the Associate Superintendent for Instruction that a Saturday morning conference be planned to facilitate communication between school staff, board members and the central office leadership. This new endeavor was funded partially through SIRT's own resources and partially through regular school funds and other federal grants. The conference represented a rare opportunity for teachers, administrators and board members to share their needs and concerns. The success of the conference has set the stage for similar efforts at other schools.

Conducting such intervention activities has come to be thought of as "normal." Three year's earlier it would have been a major crisis for the team.

Critical Issues

In the nearly three years of its existence, SIRT has evolved into an important force for change within the Buffalo Public Schools. It has substantial human and fiscal resources at its disposal and has developed solid communication links with central office administrators as well as with key leaders across the district as a whole. To reach this stage of effectiveness SIRT has had to learn how to cope with persistent issues. The more persistent issues and SIRT's responses to them are explored below.

Gaining Entry Without Invitations

Ideally change agents hope to be invited to lend assistance to bring about change. Unfortunately, in urban school environments such invitations are not readily forthcoming. In the present case schools often did not even know of SIRT's existence. Where they did, they were reluctant to admit to having difficulties that they could not resolve.

The entry pattern that has evolved in Buffalo is that schools needing help are usually identified by central office administrators, especially the Associate Superintendent of Instruction. Once schools are identified and urged to cooperate by the central office, SIRT works directly with school level leaders. Efforts are made to (1) explain how SIRT functions, (2) clarify the nature of the issues involved at the school, and (3) obtain faculty-wide commitment to cooperate.

Getting Teachers to Participate

It is preferred that entire faculties take part in school-wide interventions. However, SIRT's experience is that the involvement of entire school faculties is not practical since interventions usually take place after school or at weekend sessions. Many teachers either cannot make such sessions or simply do not care to participate. SIRT's response, based upon the fact that most long-term efforts were tending to center around problem identification and resolution rather than skill development, has been to rely on volunteers who are vitally interested in the issues involved. As a result SIRT sessions typically draw from a minimum of four or five teachers up to a maximum of about 25 percent of a faculty. Frequently the number of teachers involved increases if, as the project progresses, useful outcomes are put into effect in the school. Teacher participation also tends to vary depending upon the issues being addressed.

Developing Effective Site Teams

SIRT has also learned that specific responsibility for each intervention effort must be carefully assigned. Formerly school site staffs complained that they were unable to develop rapport with SIRT members because SIRT often interchanged member assignments. Now members are limited in the number of sites that they serve and only one or two site team members are charged with coordination of site activities, thus assuring continuity and pinpointing responsibility. In this way school staff can focus on only a few resource persons.

Liaison with the Central Office

As noted earlier, SIRT has had some difficulty in maintaining clear and open lines of communications with the central office. The Coordinator of Integration has been SIRT's nominal supervisor, but he is usually preoccupied with other tasks and has found it difficult to attend SIRT meetings to keep up with the team's activities. For its part, since SIRT members are full time teachers and administrators, the team has been hard pressed to maintain adequate communication linkages with the central office. As a result, the team has been called to task on a number of occasions for not informing the central office about its intervention activities. There have been occasional embarrassments as a result of this communications breakdown, such as the time when SIRT ran an in-service session that required compensation for teachers but the central office had not budgeted for this expense.

Such episodes finally led to the assignment of a portion of the time of a central office administrator to coordinate SIRT's reporting needs. Fortunately, this administrator was a participant in one of SIRT's earlier interventions so he knows the way the team functions and is sensitive to its needs. In fact, he attends SIRT meetings, observes site interventions and participates in budgetary discussions. As a result SIRT finally has a spokesman "downtown" and misunderstandings between the central office and the team have been greatly reduced. Further, the Coordinator of Integration has suggested that SIRT coordinators be included in Central Office staff meetings on a regular basis. This suggestion should further minimize communication gaps.

Developing Internal Leadership

The transition from consultant-direction to self-direction was vitally important, but difficult to accomplish. SIRT exhibited much dependence during the first half of its existence on its consultant, who facilitated the initial training, guided interventions, and played a dominant role in team meetings.

As the group's "job jar" grew and demands for performance by the central office increased, the pressure to take control internally also grew. By the second year the team had appointed two coordinators from its own ranks. These coordinators have gradually taken on the major direction of SIRT activities as the consultant moved first into a more passive advisement mode and later withdrew from the group entirely.

SIRT leadership is viewed more as a function than a role. Thus, the coordinators are charged with overseeing the team's budget and keeping tabs on various intervention activities, but other leadership activities are shared widely. For example, the structure of SIRT's monthly meetings permits various members to take turns as facilitators, group maintainers and process observers. Similarly every site intervention has its own leader and various SIRT members are responsible for team-wide functions such as over-all evaluation and public relations. In short, as the team moved from external control to self-direction, leadership has not fallen on any one or two members. Rather it has been purposely dispersed among the members.

The Battle for Resources

Though the costs associated with SIRT's activities are relatively low, there is a clear need to obtain sufficient resources to train SIRT members, to provide for substitutes when SIRT members are involved in interventions or planning activities, and to compensate for school staffs that are involved in SIRT interventions after regular school hours. SIRT's ESEA Title IV-C grant was sufficient to meet initial training needs, but fell short of meeting the other resource requirements.

SIRT's initial and predictable response was to petition the central office for supplementary funding. This was forthcoming on a short-term basis, but it was made clear that SIRT would have to find alternative resources if it was going to be able to survive over the long-term and serve the schools that required its assistance. Fortunately several SIRT members who have had extensive experience with grant writing have developed successful proposals that have enabled SIRT to meet its growing needs. Grants have been obtained from both Title IV-C and ESAA (the Emergency School Assistance Act), which have made SIRT the district's most well-funded in-service unit. Within a year SIRT's situation changed from one of fiscal need to one of fiscal plenty.

If SIRT's new proposals are funded during the current grant round it probably will be financially secure for up to five years. However, there is concern that the district may not recognize its own obligations so long as soft monies can be found to support the team. In other words, SIRT's adaptability may simply delay the day of reckoning when the district must decide whether it is willing to support the continuation of an internal change team.

Transferable Lessons

SIRT has been in existence for almost three full years. During these years the team has gone from a concept to a functioning internal change group. We believe that this experience can be replicated in other urban school settings. Below we have listed several key learnings that we think should be of interest to others who might be contemplating such a venture.

Self-renewal is Enhanced by the Development of Internal Change Teams

SIRT's experience indicates that even in our complex and troubled urban school settings, self-renewal is a workable concept if an internal change team is developed. For example, SIRT's continuing work with the three high schools is showing significant results in the form of new policies, structures and attitudes. Previous efforts in these same settings resulted in meager payoffs, primarily because the would-be "change agents" were outsiders who left after a brief period of effort. As a result staff members at these schools were wary of committing themselves to extensive SIRT-led efforts. However, after a period of time staff members began to see that SIRT intended to stay with them and that tangible results could be achieved. The positive environment that SIRT now finds in these settings is radically different than its initial encounters.

Self-renewal is a valid concept but only if school officials exhibit sufficient patience to let tentative seedlings blossom into flowers. Urban schools have complex problems and it takes much time

and effort to alleviate them. Without sufficient willingness to experiment on the part of key central office officials, SIRT would never have matured into a potent vehicle for school-level change and growth.

Change Teams Must Relate Well
With the Powers to Be

Ultimately the ability of a change team to function in an urban school environment depends upon the maintenance of good relations with the teachers' union and central office administrators. If the union views such a group as a challenge to its role as the spokesman for teachers, it is likely that it will try to influence school staffs to withhold their cooperation. An example of this is when the Buffalo teahhers' union, for a brief period during SIRT's first year, told teachers to refuse to participate in any in-service that did not involve compensation. SIRT worked hard to develop good relationships with the union, involving it on the team selection committee, running special sessions for union-sponsored conference days, and encouraging union building representatives to call upon SIRT if they felt their schools could use such assistance. Subsequent interactions with the union have been highly cooperative.

Central office administrators, as noted, can also make or break such a team. If they encourage school-level administrators to employ the team, support team members' needs to leave their own schools to work in other settings, help write grants, take care of administrative and coordinative details, and praises performance, especially during the early growth stages, the team will probably thrive. If it does not

do these things, it is unlikely that even the most skilled team will survive.

SIRT has learned these lessons well and has developed a number of mechanisms to keep the central office and the union fully-apprised of its activities and needs. In both cases, SIRT has developed formal and informal communication linkages. Fortunately for the team, there are several SIRT members who are able to play these roles. SIRT includes among its membership several key union officers, several principals with city-wide connections, and a central office director who has access to top-level administrators. When constituting such a team planners would do well to give as much consideration to these important linkages as to the individual abilities of potential members.

Adaptability is a Way of Life

There is no singularly effective, textbook approach for internal change teams. SIRT has persisted in large part because it has learned to adapt its strategies to meet existing contingencies. For example, as noted, in large urban school environments a change team cannot wait for invitations. School sites are rarely aware of the extent of their own problems, let alone of the existence of an internal change team. SIRT has learned to use central office administrators on occasion to gain initial entry and to employ its own informal contacts with school site staffs to help administrators and teachers become more aware of their problems and of SIRT's potential as a helper.

Similarly it may be necessary to modify intervention strategies. Specifically school teachers may be "turned off" to skill development

or believe that nothing can effectively improve their situation. In Buffalo one strategy employed by SIRT has been to seek faculty-wide agreement with a project, but to work with only those volunteers who are willing to contribute time and energy. The result is that projects are less likely to be subverted during their early phases and that skeptics will be more willing to become involved as they see some positive results. In actual fact this has been the outcome in the schools where SIRT has employed this strategy; active participation has about doubled and there has been a decreasing level of negative criticism on the part of those who have stayed on the sidelines.

These adaptations may be useful in other school districts. More relevant for now however, is the fact that any approach must be modified to meet local conditions. While Schmuck and Runkel's earlier work (Schmuck, Runkel, Arends and Arends, 1977, Chp. 12) in Kent and Eugene finds many parallels in Buffalo, there have clearly also been some important adaptations.

Cost-Benefit Considerations Are Substantial

The cost of developing an internal change team is very low, especially relative to the potential pay-offs for a school district.* Team members are already on the payroll so costs are limited to training,

* The actual cost for the direct maintenance of SIRT has been about $25,000 annually. Buffalo's 1979-1980 budget was approximately $126,000,000. SIRT's cost, therefore, represents less than .0002 percent of that budget! Another way of looking at the situation is to note that it would cost substantially more to support even one full-time change agent in a school district than it does to support a skilled internal change team of twenty teachers and administrators.

substitute time and some extra compensation for off-duty work. The advantages accrued in the form of long-term self renewal that result from the deployment of an internal change team are payoffs that cannot easily be measured in terms of dollars and cents. But it seems fair to say that the returns for investments made are great. Undoubtedly they are much greater than the returns realized through more conventional, and more costly, change approaches.

Other cost-benefit factors should also be noted. For example, many SIRT members and the staffs that they serve have noted that they are adapting their learnings to classroom teaching. Even more important, it is probable that many excellent teachers who might otherwise leave education can be persuaded to remain if they can serve on a change team similar to SIRT. More than a few SIRT members have commented that the challenges provided by SIRT have kept them in education.

In short, the direct and indirect cost-benefit payoffs appear to be significant. For these reasons we encourage other school districts to consider the establishment of their own internal change teams. Given sufficient resources and time to develop, internal change teams with committed personnel can be potent vehicles for responding to the growing needs of our troubled urban school districts.

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